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SUBJECT: FORMER ARISTIDE OFFICIALS UNDER DRUG INDICTMENT IN THE U.S.

REF: 2004 PAP 538

1. (U) Summary: Since mid-2003, seven high-profile members of the Aristide government or associates of the former President have been arrested on drug charges in the United States. Other officials are still under investigation for possible prosecution in the U.S. or Haiti. Press reports indicate that some of the individuals already arrested are cooperating with U.S. prosecutors who are investigating the Aristide government's involvement in drug trafficking, and it is possible that further arrests will be made in the near future. At the same time, the Interim Government of Haiti (IGOH) is investigating drug trafficking, money laundering, corruption and other charges against individuals connected to the Aristide government. End summary.

Long list of drug traffickers connected to Aristide

2. (U) As reftel reported more than a year ago, the Aristide regime was riddled with high-ranking officials and Aristide loyalists involved in drug trafficking. Although Aristide spoke publicly against the drug trade, he tolerated an extraordinary degree of drug-related criminality in his inner circle, the government and national police. The best that could be said of Aristide is that he could not have been ignorant of their activities. Nearly 14 months after his departure, seven top Lavalas insiders and police officials sit in Miami jails, awaiting trial or sentencing for major drug trafficking crimes during the Aristide years. As a follow-up to reftel, we present the following rogues gallery:

-- Evintz BRILLANT: Brilliant was the "anti-drug czar" for the Aristide government, appointed in December 2001 by former HNP Director General Lesly Lucien (see below) as head of the BLTS, the anti-drug unit of the HNP. He was allegedly actively involved in protecting drug shipments. Brilliant was arrested in May 2004 on U.S. drug charges emanating from the Southern District of Florida, and is scheduled for trial in April 2005.

-- Flourel CELESTIN: Celestin was a Fanmi Lavalas politician and Senate President until the Parliament ceased to function in January 2004. He was connected to several drug trafficking investigations, and was the alleged owner of 58 kilos of cocaine seized by the Haitian National Police in June 2002. He remains in jail in the U.S. awaiting trial.

-- Oriel JEAN: Jean was President Aristide's closest advisor on security matters, unofficial head of the HNP, and official chief of the Presidential Security Unit (PSU). He often communicated orders for the President and distributed money to armed gangs and political supporters. Press reports have suggested that millions of dollars in unexplained checks were made out to Jean from a Presidential account during Aristide's administration. Jean remains in a Miami jail awaiting trial.

-- Jacques KETANT: Ketant was one of the largest Haitian cocaine traffickers at the time of his arrest and expulsion to the U.S. in 2003. He regularly received security and other assistance from other individuals connected to the Aristide government who were also recently arrested, including Romaine Lestin, Stephanie Ambroise (airport director for American Airlines), and Jean Nesly Lucien. Ketant plead guilty in 2004 and was sentenced to 27 years in prison.

-- Romaine LESTIN: Lestin was a Lavalas party loyalist and thoroughly corrupt police officer suspected of involvement in drug trafficking, illegal migrant smuggling, and extortion. He illegally held concurrent positions as the Municipal Commissaire for Tabarre, the Airport Commissaire, and the Commandant of the SWAT unit of the HNP, and allegedly coerced airport employees into participating in criminal activity. Lestin had been previously fired from the Preval government for drug trafficking but was reinstated by President Aristide as a commissaire. He, too, is awaiting trial.

-- Jean Nesly LUCIEN: Lucien is the former Director General

of the Haitian National Police (i.e. chief of police) under Aristide who was arrested during travel to the United States for cocaine trafficking. Earlier, he had served as Aristide's chauffeur. Lucien pleaded guilty to money laundering in April 2005 and, according to press reports, will cooperate with authorities.

-- Rudy THERASSAN: Therassan is a former National Police Commander of the SWAT unit, arrested in May 2004 in Miami by DEA as part of the same conspiracy as Lucien and Brilliant. He plead guilty on April 20, 2005 to importing 22 pounds of cocaine into the United States as well as one count of money laundering.

13. (U) In addition to those already arrested under U.S. indictment, several Lavalas associates are under investigation by Haiti's own Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). The government announced in March, 2005 that more than 9 billion Haitian Gourdes and 110 million dollars were embezzled from the government treasury during the last three years of the Aristide government. The FIU claims it is close to releasing indictments for these allegations.

Some arrested in Haiti

14. (SBU) We would also note that some of the officials identified in reftel as being connected to drug trafficking and/or government-sponsored political violence under Aristide are under arrest in Haiti. Anthony Nazaire, the chief of the Palace motor pool under Aristide who provided Palace vehicles and security guards for drug shipments, was arrested in May 2004 on suspicion of involvement in the December 5, 2004 attack on a university by pro-Aristide hoodlums. His case is awaiting trial. Aristide's former Minister of Interior, Jocelerme Privert, is currently jailed under suspicion of involvement in a series of killings against Aristide foes and civilians that took place in Saint Marc in February 2004. The U.S. revoked his nonimmigrant visa in the fall of 2003 due to his narcotrafficking ties, and he was also suspected of involvement in Aristide government death squads, and in the sale of Haitian passports to Middle Easterners. In a separate category, finally, is Aristide's former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, who is currently jailed for an alleged connection to the Saint Marc events. He, however, played a key role assisting U.S. authorities in the rendition to the U.S. of drug traffickers Ketant and Eliobert Jasme -- the latter at some risk to himself given Eliobert's ties to the police.

Comment

15. (U) The picture that emerges from the trials, arrests and continuing investigations of members of Aristide's inner circle is that of an intricate network of drug traffickers and protection all closely connected to the Presidential Palace. The Haitian National Police in particular were hijacked by the government via a flagrant disregard of proper police promotion procedures. The selective promotion of Lavalas loyalists politicized the government security apparatus from the top and converted it into the principal arm of the Presidential Palace for the control of drug trafficking throughout the country. Aristide further undermined the police from below by placing criminal gang members directly into their ranks. As described last year in reftel, by the end the Aristide government resembled a Mafia-like or criminal syndicate in which corruption, drug-trafficking, and political repression went hand in hand.
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